FEUDALISM IN JAPAN — A REASSESSMENT

The question of whether Japan can rightly be said to "have had feudalism" is by no means settled. Although Westerners have been writing about "Japanese feudalism" for well over a hundred years, the acceptability of this practice is still a matter of controversy among professional historians, notably among those who make the study of medieval Europe their specialty. To a long line of Western historians ending with Herbert Norman, however, there was no question about the appropriateness of placing the feudal label on Japan. Nor does the contemporary Japanese historian question a term which has become so important a part of his professional as well as everyday vocabulary. In a Japan in which the reading public is daily reminded that the "struggle against feudalism" is still being waged, feudalism seems a present reality which by its very nature cannot be denied to have existed in Japan's past.

To the Japanese historian of today feudalism in Japan is not only real, it is also the same universal reality against which the "more progressive" Western peoples had to struggle before their eventual emancipation. As Nagahara Keiji has put it,

> It is now generally accepted that capitalism in Japan developed upon a foundation laid in the semi-feudal land ownership pattern of the villages. The power of the feudalistic landlords and the bourgeoisie, though on the surface full of mutual contradictions, served fundamentally to reinforce each other, leading inevitably to the military defeat of August 15th. Although it appeared at first that the land reform had decisively revolutionized the self-reinforcement of these two groups, dissolving large-scale landlordism and high rent tenancy and thereby destroying the feudal relationships within the village, actually it did not produce any such fundamental change. To the contrary, recent studies have shown that it resulted in a re-strengthening of feudal relationships under colonial control.[1]

American historians who reject this view are apt to be reminded by their Japanese colleagues that they have been spared the onus of living under feudalism and hence cannot appreciate its reality. Certainly the American scholar does not commute through a countryside which to him constitutes a living reminder of "the feudalism of the village". But while we cannot deny the Japanese his emotions of social protest, we can question whether the

[1] Nagahara Keiji, *Nihon hōkenshakai ron* (Tokyo, 1955), 8.

object of his attack is the same feudal system against which our European forefathers railed. This surely is a problem which can be studied objectively.

The question of whether the idea of feudalism can be applied to Japan (or any other society outside Wetsern Europe) has exercised the minds of scholars since the time of Voltaire and Montesquieu. The endless conflict between what we might term the "broad" and "narrow" approaches to this problem has led down to the present generation in which we find a Marc Bloch suggesting the existence of "feudalism as a type of society" or a Bryce Lyon insisting that Western European feudalism is "unique".[2] In the light of this controversy the general historian who has no special stake in the problem is apt to assume a double standard, accepting as popular but misguided the usage that generalizes the term beyond the confines of Europe, and retaining for his own professional purposes a usage which limits the term to Western European societies. Pressed on the issue he is apt to reply, "I have no objection to anyone calling Japan feudal so long as *that* feudalism is not confused with the real thing." But for two types of historians, the question of whether feudalism as a general concept is appropriately applied to Japan cannot be so easily circumvented. One is the student of Japanese history, be he Japanese or Western, who must eventually commit himself to whether he will use or reject the concept in his writings. The other is the comparative historian, whose subject matter is the very stuff of which the feudalism controversy is made.

In the final analysis the question of whether the concept of feudalism can be applied to Japan raises two basic historiographical issues: first the idea of feudalism itself and its appropriateness as a general category of social organization, and second the methodology of comparative history and its validity as a branch of historical study. The case of Japan, it should be noted, is critical to both of these issues. For it is in part the discovery of similarities between certain Japanese institutions and those of Medieval Europe which has give courage to some historians to formulate the idea of feudalism as a general concept and has helped support the comparative historian's view in the utility of his approach. The importance of the Japanese experience to the comparative historian is apparent in such a recent work as *Feudalism in History,* in which Japan is cited along with Europe as exhibiting one of "only two fully-proven cases of feudalism", or indeed, "the classic case of feudalism".[3]

How has it come about that Japan has bulked so large in the feudalism controversy, and furthermore that the practice of calling Japan feudal has

[2] Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society* (Chicago, 1961), 441ff.; Bryce Lyon, *The Middle Ages in Recent Historical Thought* (Washington, Service Center for Teachers of History, 1959), 13.

[3] Rushton Coulborn, *Feudalism in History* (Princeton, 1956), 185; 199.

been so widely accepted? One answer is provided by the nature of Japanese history itself which has yielded so many startling comparisons with the feudal institutions of Europe. But another, and deeper one perhaps, lies in the way in which Japanese and Western historians have tended to reinforce each other in their thinking on this question. During the eighteenth century the societies of Japan and Europe both arrived at the discovery of their "feudal past" along independent, but parallel paths. Marc Bloch has found the earliest example of the use of the term *féodalité* as a reference to a state of society to go back no farther than 1727.[4] Certainly the earliest Western writers on Japan, those who wrote before the concept of feudalism had taken shape in Europe, did not describe Japan as feudal. This applied to Kaempfer, Thunberg, and Titsingh, who wrote as late as the 1790's. Western writers were not to take up the practice of calling Japan feudal until the nineteenth century; significantly, not until the Japanese themselves had begun to show an awareness of the distinctiveness of the particular form of society which they were beginning to put behind them.

Japanese historians had long recognized the ascendancy of the military aristocracy as a pivotal event in their national history. Historians of the seventeenth century commonly referred to the epoch of Japanese history from the middle of the twelfth century down to their own time as the age of military houses (*buke-jidai*). During the eighteenth century, Japanese scholars began to apply to this period the word *hōken,* a term of Chinese origin referring to the decentralized form of government which characterized the Chou dynasty. By 1827, when Rai Sanyō completed his *Nihon gaishi* (Unofficial history of Japan), the term had gained general currency.[5]

It is not precisely certain when western observers first described Japan as feudal. Von Siebold writing shortly before 1841 may well have been the first when he wrote:

> Japan is a feudal empire in the strictest sense of the term. The *mikado,* as being the successor and representative of the gods, is the nominal proprietor, as well as sovereign, of the realm, and the *ziogoon* is his deputy or viceregent. His domains, with the exception of the portion reserved to the Crown, are divided into principalities, held in vassalage by their respective hereditary princes. Under them the land is parcelled out among the nobility who hold their hereditary estates by military service.[6]

To other nineteenth century observers who followed von Siebold, it was with a real sense of excitement that they reported experiencing in Japan a condition of society so similar to the feudalism of their own remembrance. To Alcock in 1863 Japan presented "a living embodiment of a state of society which

[4] Bloch, *Feudal Society,* xvii.

[5] Kimura Isō, *Nihon hōkenshakai kenkyū shi* (Tokyo, 1956), 4.

[6] Contained in M. M. Busk, ed., *Manners and Customs of the Japanese in the 19th Century* (New York, 1841), 142.

existed many centuries ago in the West; . . . an Oriental phase of feudalism, such as our ancestors knew it in the time of the Plantagenets".[7] To William Griffis writing in 1870 the fit was even more striking:

> Here were real gentlemen, who had served as pages in feudal mansions, had given the tokens of vassalage and had received their lord's beneficium. Their stories of the ceremonial gift of a flower, the presentation of an arrow, or some other emblem of feudal service—contemptible in market value, but priceless from the viewpoint of loyalty—touched the imagination. Men from the ends of the earth, who had heard of Europe only from books, told me of things which matched anything read about in the varied feudalisms of France, Germany, or England.[8]

By the 1880's knowledge of Japanese institutions was sufficiently widespread in Europe that Karl Marx could make his famous statement in *Capital:* "Japan, with its purely feudal organization of landed property and its developed *petite culture,* gives a much truer picture of the European middle ages than our own history books, dictated as these are, for the most part, by bourgeois prejudices."[9]

In a reverse manner, once Japan was exposed to knowledge of European feudal institutions it did not take long for Japanese historians to transfer the term *hōken* out of its previous context and to adopt it as a translation for the European concept of feudalism. The origin of this practice goes back at least to 1888 in the writings of Yokoi Tokifuyu. Japanese historians have continued this practice to the present, following two major lines of interpretation. The first group of Japanese scholars to use the word consciously according to a specified definition were the "legal historians" such as Miura Kaneyuki and Nakada Kaoru. These men, who published during the early 1900's, equated the Japanese *hōken* system with the feudalism of such Western legal historians as Maitland. They were followed after the early 1920's by writers, beginning with Hani Gorō and Hayakawa Jirō, who adopted the Marxist definition of feudalism.[10]

Characteristic of the Japanese use of the concept of feudalism has been a rather simplistic theoretical assumption of its universal applicability to all societies. Maki Kenji, dean of the legal historians today, expresses this straightforward approach in the preface to his *Nihon hōkenseido seiritsu shi* (History of the establishment of the feudal system in Japan):

> In surveying the history of the rise of the civilized countries of the world today we can say that all have demonstrated a common three-stage development from a tribal antiquity through a feudal middle age to a bourgeois modern age. Japanese history has followed this same process . . . It is useful to study the feudal system of Japan as a historic fact, and further to make comparisons with ancient China

[7] Sir Rutherford Alcock, *The Capital of the Tycoon* (London, 1863), 109.
[8] William Eliot Griffis, untitled manuscript, Rutgers University Library.
[9] Karl Marx, *Capital* (Chicago, 1912), 789.
[10] Kimura Isō, *Nihon hōkenshakai*, 5.

and medieval Europe as a means of clarifying important aspects of Japanese history by pointing up common features and special characteristics.[11]

Marxist historians in Japan also have assumed without significant change the applicability to Japanese society of the general theory of feudalism set forth by Marx in his *Capital* or by Lenin in his *Development of Capitalism in Russia.*[12]

Outside Marxist circles, it was Kan'ichi Asakawa who gave academic respectability to the use of the idea of Japanese feudalism in the West. Asakawa, by his remarkable control of the primary data of both European and Japanese institutions, was able to develop a coherent and systematic methodology for the comparative treatment of feudalism in Europe and Japan. His essay "Some Aspects of Japanese Feudal Institutions" has long remained the standard interpretation of the subject.[13] Only in recent years has the French scholar Joüon des Longrais supplemented Asakawa's work, largely on the basis of Japanese scholarship of the legal school.[14]

In reviewing the literature on "Japanese feudalism", both in Japanese and Western languages, one is struck by large areas of disagreement over precise terms of definition and by a general lack of theoretical sophistication. Even among professional historians there has been too easy an assumption of comparability between Japan and Europe or too ready an acceptance of certain developmental schemes of history in which feudalism is considered a "stage". Among non-specialists the term is used quite loosely. Once the similarity between certain conditions in Japan and those of medieval Europe was pointed out, it became common for both Western and Japanese writers to refer to Japanese institutions quite indiscriminately as feudal, with little concern over the theoretical problems engendered by such a usage. The term has entered popular literature where it is applied to any of a wide variety of traits which seem to have counterparts in medieval Europe. In Japan today, feudalism has taken on a popular pejorative meaning which is applied to almost any aspect of contemporary life which seems old-fashioned or touched with the older social or family ethic—a term with which children criticize their parents, or socialists label their conservative opponents.

Such widespread abuses have naturally prejudiced serious scholars against the possibility of extending the idea of feudalism outside its European context. But the question of whether feudalism can be conceived of as a general category of social organization or must be considered an event unique to European history surely need not be avoided because of such abuses, however much they may exasperate the historian. The systematic comparative historian

[11] Maki Kenji, *Nihon hōkenseido seiritsu shi* (Tokyo, 1935), 1-2.

[12] V. I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (Moscow, 1956), 190-192.

[13] K. Asakawa, "Some Aspects of Japanese Feudal Institutions", *TASJ*, XLVI, Part 1 (1918), 77-102.

[14] Jouön des Longrais, *L'Est et L'Ouest* (Tokyo, Paris, 1958).

is not obliged to assume responsibility for these abuses, but rather must seek to devise an orderly treatment of the problem, so that it can be studied for what it is, a problem in comparative historical theory.

A systematic approach to the question of whether "Japan had feudalism or not" should begin with a clear understanding of what is being asked. The question which the comparative historian asks is not whether it is possible to identify in Japan a pattern of history identical with that of Western Europe. He is not seeking to find "European feudalism" in Japan. Nor is he trying to hitch Japanese history onto an assembly line of universal historical development in which feudalism is a fixed stage. His objective is both more modest and more ambitious. He is concerned, rather, with this question, "Has Japanese society at any time in its history exemplified a pattern of social organization which, along with that of Europe, may properly be labeled feudal?" This is a question which need not concern all historians, and its solution need not disturb those who are not intrigued by the question itself. It is a question asked by the historian who wishes to engage explicitly in the kind of theorizing and categorizing which arises from the analysis of broad segments of human development which may embrace more than one culture.

In the strictest sense, of course, the historian can never isolate himself from the comparative implications of his work. For to greater or lesser extent the historian, by his use of concepts of varying degrees of abstractness, is constantly involved in the process of comparison between the actual data as he finds them and the generalized vocabulary with which he must conceptualize them. But this hidden comparative element in historical judgment is seldom explicitly recognized. The historical profession in practice demands a choice between the commonly practiced work in which comparison is implicit, limited and short range, and the more overt, explicit, and generalized form of it. Comparison of the explicit type is usually regarded as a separate branch of historical activity dealing most often with more than one culture. Its objectives and conclusions are considered different from those historical endeavors which confine themselves to a single cultural tradition. The problem of "feudalism in Japan" is clearly one which lies within the field of comparative history.

What makes the concept of feudalism particularly difficult to handle for the comparative historian is, of course, the complexity of the phenomena about which it tries to generalize. The historian's vocabulary is full of terms which have cross-cultural relevancy and are used without exciting controversy. No voices are raised against the practice of calling the Japanese *tennō* an emperor or the Japanese *mura* a village. But it is equally evident that these terms do not carry the same causative significance for the historian; they do not "seek to explain" as much of a whole society or epoch as does the concept of feudalism. Here presumably feudalism enters the company of general ideas such as nationalism, absolutism, or imperialism, but with the

disadvantage that no Norman landing touched Japanese shores and no crusading knights crossed swords with the men of Kamakura. If we conclude that Japan was feudal we must do so with the full realization that Japan *became feudal independently of Europe.* This is the kind of thought that seems either to excite or revolt the historian, depending upon his predilection to seek out patterns of social development or to hold to the uniqueness of individual events.

The large organizing concepts of the genre of feudalism as used by the comparative historian arise out of his conviction that, while the events of history may appear to be infinite and infinitely varied, the general patterns of organization and structure of human society, in other words, the ways in which mankind meets its problems of living, are not infinite. The historian naturally does not find human society neatly ordered in classifiable genuses, but neither did the botanist or biologist at the outset of his inquiry into the nature of his data. While pattern and structure are more apt to project themselves out of diverse social data than absolute individuality or uniqueness, the complexity of the patterns which interest the historian are such that the categories of classification are not readily apparent in the data. Thus, if pattern is to be found, it must await the generalizing capacities of the human observer. It is only as theory and concept are worked against historical data that pattern is identified and definition refined. The questions the comparative historian asks are whether feudalism may be adopted as a term of reference for one pattern of social configuration, and whether such a pattern is relevant to more than one unique historical situation.

As a category of human organization, feudalism should be definable as an ideal type. The kind of definition needed is a statement of certain sets of relationships within a social framework which distinguishes the feudal type of society from other types. In setting up such a definition the responsibility for what is included or excluded admittedly rests with the historian, but this does not depend by any means solely on the historian's whim or imagination. It should derive from the historian's systematic application of hypothesis to empirical data.

Too much argument over the definition of feudalism, and especially over the question of whether Japan "fits the feudal pattern", has lacked the benefit of methodological uniformity. Different historians have used different conceptions of feudalism, or often the same historian has varied his definition to suit different arguments. Broadly speaking historians have tended to fall into two particular habits of conceptualization which, from the comparative point of view, have interfered with the cumulative refinement of the idea of feudalism. The first of these results from the use of what we might call the overly particularistic definition, one phrased almost exclusively in terms of some specific set of "feudal conditions" found within some particular area of Western Europe. Now it goes without saying that a definition which

constitutes little more than full description of one or another of the Western European societies during the ninth century through the thirteenth can be of very little use for comparative purposes. Such a definition lays itself open to revision by each new particularistic study. Each new community which is studied adds a cluster of new qualifications to the original definition or casts doubt upon the definition itself. A logical extension of this approach makes it difficult to agree upon any single definition of feudalism for the various regions of Western Europe alone.

Those who take the particularistic approach to feudalism thus find it all the more difficult to accept a general definition which might be extended beyond Europe. Having demonstrated that Japanese institutions were not exactly like those of Europe, they either resist the use of feudalism for Japan or suggest that Japan gave rise to a "different kind of feudalism", something which should be called "Japanese feudalism". As one recent writer has put it, feudalism "was a system peculiar to Western Europe and was not found elsewhere except in a few regions of the Mediterranean and in the Middle East, where it was introduced for a time by the crusaders. This does not mean that there were not other feudal systems in other areas of the world, but that Western feudalism was quite different from Byzantine, Moslem, Japanese, and Chinese feudalism. These feudal systems existed during different periods of world history, were organized on different principles, and were developed to meet demands peculiar to the regions in which they arose."[15]

This statement exposes the dilemma inherent in a definition which limits feudalism to Western Europe. For if feudalism is unique to Western Europe, how then can one speak of other feudalisms? And if other feudalisms are recognized, then what features of these other societies make it possible to consider them feudal? Is it semantically any different to speak of "Japanese feudalism" or "feudalism in Japan?" In other words either feudalism must be considered truly unique or it must be treated as a generalized phenomenon.

But the issues raised by the particularistic definers are nonetheless of crucial theoretical importance to a consideration of feudalism as a general concept. Their particular concern is with what we might call the vertical limits (or limits of generality) of definition. Any society or social institution may be described in various degrees of complexity and specificity. For comparative purposes it is most useful to conceive of a general type so as to cover more than an extremely narrow range of subject matter. The historian may choose his level of generality. But once his definition is arrived at, it can be used only at the level of abstraction for which it is designed. Too often the argument as to whether Japan "fits" the feudal pattern is decided by changing the definition as the argument proceeds. A generalized definition at the outset is made more and more specific until the historian, consciously or uncon-

[15] Bryce Lyon, *The Middle Ages*, 13.

sciously, is using a definition which is little more than a complete description of medieval France or England. The argument often goes as follows. Granted that Japanese society developed certain gross similarities to European society during the feudal age, this is not enough. For once one penetrates below surface likenesses, all sorts of differences can be pointed out. Hence Japanese feudalism cannot be likened to European feudalism. The argument is clinched by some such statement as "The Japanese oath of vassalage did not involve the same contractual relations as in Europe." But to argue in this way is to make comparative history impossible. For if at every point of apparent comparability one is to drop down into a lower level of specificity to look for differences, one can never get beyond a fascination with differences alone.

The fact that if a general concept is to be useful, the limits of generality at which the concept is defined must be agreed upon by the historian is often taken as a demonstration of the arbitrary nature of the concept. Under such circumstances, it is argued, is not one definition as good as another? Is not the comparative historian deciding in advance which societies he wishes to include under his type and then drawing a definition around them? Let us remember that the categorization of societies into general types is not easily done and requires the empirical working of hypothetical definitions back and forth against the data provided by many societies, as well as against definitions of other social types. The utility of a general definition of a social type is that it unites into a single integrated concept a number of separable elements of society. A general concept of feudalism makes it possible to draw together, around certain basic similarities, a number of societies which may differ in many other details. In other words, it makes it possible on a hypothetical basis to hold constant certain variables while studying others. Essentially, then, the criterion for setting the vertical limits of a general definition will depend upon the variables which the historian wishes to "hold constant".

The second unsatisfactory approach to the problem of definition results from what might be called a linear or developmental conception of feudalism. This method has looked upon feudalism as a stage in a process of political or social development which begins with certain specific preconditions and terminates in certain other specifically defined postconditions. A definition of this type contains, either implicitly or explicitly, a commitment to the kind of society which produces feudalism and the kind which results after it disappears. Societies are included or excluded from the feudal category on the basis of such prior or postconditions or on whether the pattern of internal development conforms to a norm. More specifically, a society is excluded from consideration if its process of entrance into or exit from the feudal state does not coincide with the European pattern.

The evolutionary view of feudalism like the particularistic one lays itself open to attack from individual histories of varying societies which may not coincide with what has been assumed to be the typical process. The attempt

to find "uniformities in history" which motivated the Conference on Feudalism and resulted in the volume *Feudalism in History* illustrates many of the difficulties which beset the effort to base uniformity on parallelisms of specific chains of historical events. For while it is unquestionably true that certain types of society under certain conditions are more apt to contain the seeds of feudalism, these do not constitute the only conditions from which feudalism might emerge. While it is informative to inquire whether or not the "feudal periods" of China and Japan were preceded by the decay of a previous empire, this exercise does not constitute part of the necessary "proof" for the existence or nonexistence of feudalism in these countries. One need not strain to stretch out the "ghost" of the Han Empire of China as a prelude to Japanese feudalism, as Coulborn does in *Feudalism in History*.[16] Rather it was the particular administrative and legal conditions which existed in Japan in the twelfth century which provide the scaffolding upon which feudal institutions rose.

Nonetheless, certain questions raised by the advocates of the developmental approach to feudalism can help to clarify another important dimension of the conceptual problem inherent in general concepts. What the developmental approach does, essentially, is to ask questions about the boundaries of feudalism on a horizontal level. If feudalism is to be defined by a certain set of political and social variables, we must determine some manner of distinguishing the limits of these variables. And this can be done only as historians differentiate other patterns of government or society which appear to be distinct from feudalism. In other words it is difficult to conceive of feudalism without having come to grips more precisely with the concepts of what is not feudal. Without other possible categories of social organization in mind, we have little with which to determine the external boundaries of our conception of what is feudal, and we have little notion of how to describe the preconditions which give rise to feudalism. One of the reasons for the difficulty which historians have had with this and other terms of social generalization is the lack of a systematic nomenclature in contiguous areas. Yet this paucity of terminology is not a proof of the inappropriateness of the attempt to develop general concepts. It is only after extended periods of trial and error analysis that historians or sociologists can come to some sort of agreement on what are the most meaningful categories in which to differentiate the varied moments of social history and where best to place the boundaries between these types.

The historian today does not lack for existing efforts at defining feudalism. By now enough hands have been at work upon the problem of feudalism so that the "feudal condition" has been sufficiently isolated for definitional purposes. Yet there has been little agreement among historians, even among

[16] Rushton Coulborn, *Feudalism*, 246-247.

those working exclusively within the field of European history, on a common set of criteria. Instead there has been a rather persistent dispute between two varieties of definition: one "narrow" in that it limits its scope to the political or legal sphere, the other "broad" in that it takes in a wider consideration of the whole society. It is unfortunate that arguments over the appropriateness of these two types of definition have bulked so large in the treatment of feudalism, for in the final analysis there is no unresolvable difference between them. The two types in actuality describe two different sets of criteria, which themselves are not contradictory. Very often, in fact, the proponents of the narrow definition must rely on the broader concept of feudal society in the course of their writing.

A characteristic definition of feudalism from the narrow point of view is presented by Coulborn and Strayer in *Feudalism in History*. Their so-called "provisional description" of feudalism begins as follows: "Feudalism is primarily a method of government, not an economic or a social system, though it obviously modified and is modified by the social and economic environment. It is a method of government in which the essential relation is not that between ruler and subject, nor state and citizen, but between lord and vassal."[17] But the authors do not stop at this limited statement. Instead they continue to amplify their description until they have carried it into the social and economic fields. First they add to the core concept the criterion that "political authority is treated as a private possession", then further that "since political power is personal, rather than institutional, there is relatively little separation of functions; the military leader is usually an administrator and the administrator is usually a judge". From here they enter the social area by adding that while "the men who discharge political functions in a feudal society are not necessarily aristocrats when they first begin to gain power, . . . they soon are recognized as an aristocracy," and this makes for "a strong, almost irresistible tendency towards heredity of function." The description goes on to point up the connection between feudalism and landed property. It concludes that "it seems likely that in a fully feudal society there will be an almost equal development of both vassalage and the fief."[18] The difficulties inherent in the historian's attempt to limit himself to the political or authority syndrome when dealing with feudalism are even more evident in the comparative sections of *Feudalism in History* in which Coulborn is obliged to carry on his analysis in terms of the broader, though never clearly defined, concept of feudal society.

This problem of comparison has not been forced upon Coulborn simply because he chose to deal with several cultures. It confronts even those who remain within the confines of European history or of a single European country, for studies across time within a closed system present the historian

[17] *Ibid.*, 4-5.
[18] *Ibid.*, 5-6.

with the need to establish criteria for differentiating "stages" of development, and this too takes the historian out of the purely political syndrome. This point is illustrated in a recent treatment of European feudalism by Bryce Lyon, in which he described different stages of feudalism, differentiating them in terms of changes in the lord-vassal nexus which were discernible mainly in the areas of economic and ideological change. As he explains,

> The traditional system of feudalism declined in the thirteenth century and was of slight importance in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. Feudal thinking and behavior, however, remained strong and account for the feudalism of money and the indenture system, both prominent in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. When speaking of the decline of feudalism, we must evade the pitfall of keeping the traditional feudalism around until the end of the middle ages and must speak instead of a feudalism of money and of an indenture system that nourished variant forms of feudalism down to the sixteenth century.[19]

The historian's problem, once he moves out of the narrow confines of the political definition of feudalism, is to place boundaries around these "variant forms", and for this he must be prepared to draw a broad area of social activity into his purview.

The narrow definition of feudalism, since it limits its scope to the lord-vassal nexus and to the system of government derived from it, is essentially an effort to define "feudal government". As such it is a perfectly appropriate concept, but it should be understood for what it is. The narrow definition cannot serve as a description of feudal society as a whole. It is not logically possible to restrict the concept of feudalism to mean "feudal government" and at the same time expect it to serve as a description of "feudal society". Such phrases as "feudal England" or "feudal Japan", though used by those who profess the narrow definition, frequently carry connotations which imply a great deal more than the mere fact that England and Japan had "feudal governments" at the time. They imply that the whole societies can be wrapped up in the concept of feudalism.

Unquestionably, proponents of the narrow view of feudalism, by placing their emphasis on a relatively small set of cultural relationships, are correct in avoiding one major danger which besets the historian who would use feudalism as a general social concept. A total society cannot necessarily be subsumed under a single all-inclusive concept. Thus while a model of feudalism expressed as a comprehensive social system may be conceived of as an ideal possibility, the elements of which such a model is composed will not necessarily embrace a whole society at any given time. In any specific society, it is possible that feudalism, as a form of government and as a set of social and economic organizations relating to it, may exist in equilibrium with other forms of social organization. Moreover, it is possible that in a given society,

[19] Bryce Lyon, *The Middle Ages*, 17.

certain relationships which by definition are part of the feudal system will be more typically developed than others. By definition then, feudalism as an ideal type need not be exemplified by the totality of a society at any given time.

It is also well to heed the words of the proponents of the narrow definition of feudalism that one should be cautious in ascribing non-political elements to the feudal model. A model of feudal society should be constructed so that its parts are logically related to the political core. Too broad a definition can be as destructive of useful analysis as too narrow a one. In moving outward from the crucial lord-vassal nexus the historian must be careful to bring into his definition only what appear to be the necessary concomitants and not a host of other irrelevant cultural traits.

But how is the historian to establish criteria for the inclusion or rejection of traits in his definition of feudalism? Here again we must return to the proposition that the historian is dependent upon the full state of inquiry into the comparative structures of society, for it is only as the various elements of societies in general are classified and the combinations studied that, as K. A. Wittfogel has expressed it, the "essential, specific, and nonspecific" elements of a social type can be differentiated. Actually the study of feudalism has attracted the attention of historians for such a length of time that there is a large area of agreement over the general categories which should be included in the concept. There is in fact no lack of existing definitions which agree in all but secondary characteristics or in emphasis. In the main these differences are the result not of stubborn details which refuse to yield to generalization, but rather of the different operational interests of the scholars proposing them.

It will be helpful to review a number of "broad" definitions of feudalism to see how various theorists have conceived of feudalism and whether some form of composite definition is feasible. One of the broadest, and a good one with which to start, is found in the following statement by K. A. Wittfogel:

> The feudal system of limited and conditional service (not unconditional subservience), vassalage (not bureaucracy), and fief (not office land) is essential to the medieval societies of Europe and Japan. It occurs so rarely elsewhere that it may be considered specific to these societies.
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> Corvée labor is an essential element of hydraulic and feudal societies, and serfdom (the attachment of the peasant to his land or village) is essential to the helotage-based societies of ancient Greece, to feudal society, and to most simple and semicomplex Oriental societies. That is, both institutions are essential to more than one type of society and specific to none.
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> Innumerable elements of technology, custom, art, and belief occur widely and without being either essential or specific to the conditions of power, status, and property—that is, to the crucial relations within any society . . . Recognition of these facts should go far in correcting the idea of a 'necessary relation between all possible aspects of the same social organism.'[20]

[20] K. A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism* (New Haven, 1957), 414-415.

The interesting feature of Wittfogel's statement is that it defines feudal society along with a number of other types, thus providing some measure of the horizontal limits of feudalism. It also groups the elements of the definition into essential and non-essential categories, making it possible to classify a number of types of society in terms of a limited number of variables. But Wittfogel's definition is useful chiefly for the purposes for which it was devised, namely the most general kind of theorizing about whole cultures or civilizations.

For a more characteristically political definition we can turn to Max Weber who includes feudalism as a category in his discussion of "types of authority".

1. The authority of the chief is reduced to the likelihood that the vassals will voluntarily remain faithful to their oaths of fealty.

2. The political corporate group is completely replaced by a system of relations of purely personal loyalty between the lord and his vassals and between these, in turn, and their own sub-vassals (sub-infeudation) etc. Only a lord's own vassals are bound by fealty to him; whereas they in turn can claim the fealty of their own vassals, etc.

3. Only in the case of a 'felony' does the lord have a right to deprive his vassal of his fief . . .

4. There is a hierarchy of social rank corresponding to the hierarchy of fiefs through the process of sub-infeudation . . . This is not, however, a hierarchy of authority in the bureaucratic sense . . .

5. The elements in the population who do not hold fiefs involving some element of patrimonial or other political authority are 'subjects'; that is, they are patrimonial dependents. They are dependent on the holders of fiefs, on the one hand, in that their traditional status, particularly class status, determines or permits it, or on the other so far as the coercive power in the hands of the possessors of military fiefs compels it, since they are to a large extent defenseless . . .

6. Powers over the individual budgetary unit, including domains, slaves, and serfs, the fiscal rights of the political group to the receipt of taxes and contributions, and specifically political powers of jurisdiction and compulsion to military service—thus powers over free men—are all objects of feudal grants in the same way . . .[21]

While there are no profound differences between this definition by Weber and the fuller "description" contained in *Feudalism in History*, Weber has couched his statement in more general and structural terms. Furthermore in other portions of his analysis of authority he provides criteria which make it possible to place feudalism in context with other political systems such as patrimonial government and bureaucracy.

[21] Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Glencoe, Ill., 1947), 375-376.

One of the most elegantly simple definitions of feudalism is in actuality one of the oldest and reflects the particular legal biases of F. W. Maitland. According to Maitland, feudalism was "a state of society in which all or a great part of public rights and duties are inextricably interwoven with the tenure of land, in which the whole government system—financial, military, judicial—is part of the law of private property".[22] Such a conception neatly draws together the relationship of land rights and political authority, but it misjudges the extent of private authority permissible in a non-contractual society. One of the chief characteristics of the feudal system was the very non-existence of private property as such, for there was no possession free and clear without reciprocity. For this reason it would be better to reverse Maitland's proposition so as to emphasize the submersion of private rights within the government system.[23]

While Weber and Maitland stress governmental relationships in feudalism, the sociologist is more in need of a definition which clarifies the social structure of feudalism. Such a one is provided by Marion Levy:

a) closed social classes,
b) a well-defined hierarchy of power-holders,
c) identification, at least ideally speaking, of each individual as responsible to some particular individual higher than himself in the hierarchy and related to others outside of that direct line by virtue of his overlord's relations to them, and
d) a distribution of goods and services, most especially land ownership and control, primarily on the basis of the ranks distinguished in the hierarchy of power and responsibility.[24]

Levy's definition is also distinguished by structural simplicity and generality. For the historian, however, it is unquestionably too general. Specifically it does not provide for the aristocratic nature of the ruling groups and their monopoly of military power, although these features may be deduced from the conditions stated in Levy's model. It says little about the relationship between public and private exercise of authority and nothing about the economic and technological level of the society.

Yet another approach to feudalism puts its stress upon economic relationships. A standard version of this approach is found in Lenin's definition of "corvée economy" in his *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*:

Firstly, the predominance of natural economy ... Secondly, such an economy required that the direct producer be allotted the means of production in general, and land in particular; moreover, that he be tied to the land, since otherwise the

[22] F. W. Maitland, *The Constitutional History of England* (Cambridge, 1931), 22.
[23] I am indebted to Professor Karl Deutsch of Yale University for this point.
[24] Marion J. Levy, Jr., "Contrasting Factors in the Modernization of China and Japan", *Economic Development and Cultural Change* II. 3 (Oct., 1953), 193, n. 3.

landlord was not assured of hands . . . Thirdly, a condition for such a system of economy was the personal dependence of the peasant on the landlord . . . There was required 'extra-economic coercion', as Marx calls it . . . Fourthly, and finally, a condition and consequence of the system of economy described was the extremely low and stagnant condition of technique, for the conduct of husbandry was in the hands of small peasants, crushed by poverty and degraded by personal dependence and by ignorance.[25]

This statement, though clearly limited to a description of the economic features of "feudal Russia", has been taken by some scholars as a sufficient definition of feudalism in its entirety. Its inadequacy for such a purpose stems from the limitations of the purpose for which it was set forth and in particular for its failure to take into consideration the political and social aspects of the system.

Finally, let us return to a definition of a more descriptive nature specifically devised to serve as a tool of comparative study for European and Japanese institutions. This is the noteworthy formulation by Asakawa:

In a feudal society:—(1) The ruling class should consist of groups of fighting men, each group chained together by links of an exhaustive personal bond of mutual service—a bond so personal that, in the last analysis, it should obtain, in each link, between two armed men only, lord and vassal: and so exhaustively personal that the one should swear to the other fidelity even unto death. Although the vassal's service is usually rewarded with a grant of land, land enters into this relation only as a secondary factor, the primary motive power being the personal agreement in arms between the lord and his man. (2) There, however, being other classes of people also, the division of all the classes, including the warrior class, should coincide with their private tenures of land,—the private land law of this peculiar society recognizing no absolute ownership, (except perhaps in the supreme overlord, if he did exist), but only a series of relative tenures. (3) In the general political life of the society as a whole, these private tenures of land should condition the exercise of public rights and obligations; and the superior rights of land should fall into the hands of the privately armed men, who should accordingly assume all the public functions of State;—in other words, the ruling class having secured the control of arms and land, there should result the singular spectacle of the private usurpation of public rights, and the public utilization of private institutions; that is, in government, in finance, in military affairs and in the administration of justice, there should be a complete confusion or coalescence of the public and the private.[26]

Asakawa's definition is close to those of Weber and Strayer. It puts its emphasis upon the bond uniting lord and vassal and on the fief which links private status with public authority. It offers an explanation for the conditions which gave rise to serfdom though it does not mention it specifically. Its major defect perhaps is its assumption that the exercise of authority by the ruling class was a "usurpation" of public rights.

It would be possible to pile more definitions on top of the ones we have

[25] Lenin, *Capitalism in Russia*, 191-192.
[26] Asakawa, "Some Aspects", 78-79.

already selected, but we have certainly reviewed a representative group. It should be evident also that the above definitions, though differing in their operational purposes and in specific details, serve to outline a fairly consistent core of essential features of feudalism as a social system. These features can be grouped into three general categories: political, social, and economic. Within each of these sectors of society the definitions tend to agree on certain particular types of essential relationships, thought they differ over the manner and specificity with which they should be described. In the final analysis, then, the problem of definition hinges upon a limited number of questions of sub-definition at a secondary level of generalization.

One of the weaknesses of the common style of definition, such as those just cited, is that each is stated in static, two-dimensional terms. Such a style of definition tends to obscure the hypothetical nature of general concepts and the dynamic conditions within real societies to which a concept such as feudalism refers. A more useful model of feudalism, therefore, would be one expressed in two parts: first a statement of essential variables within each of several related sectors of society, and secondly a statement regarding the limits of variability of these elements. Let us conclude this inquiry into definition by attempting to restate the agreed upon elements of feudalism contained in the definitions cited above into a hypothetically and dynamically conceived statement of this sort.

Within the political sector, it is generally agreed that the essential feudal element is located in the lord-vassal complex, a relationship which shades on the one hand with the patrimonial structure of authority isolated by Weber and on the other hand with the bureaucratic structure of authority (at least in more technologically advanced societies). The essential feature of this lord-vassal complex is not a specific form of contract but rather the personal nature of the association (symbolized by homage in Europe) and its military origin. To say the relationship is voluntary (as Weber does) is to misjudge the role of the "consensus of conduct" based on knowledge of or remnants of a former legal system.[27]

In the social sector the feudal condition contrasts with aristocratic or slave-based societies on the one hand and the more freely mobile modern societies on the other. An important element of feudalism is arms-bearing as a class-defining profession. The feudal condition is distinguished by a relative closing of the social status system in which (for these groups dependent primarily on the land) the distribution of goods and services is closely integrated with the hierarchy of social statuses. There may be some disagreement over whether the fief is an essential feature of the political and social sectors, but the manner of distribution of rights and privileges over land and the workers of the land is certainly an essential ingredient.

[27] Conversation with Professor Karl Deutsch.

Within the economic sector we begin with certain technological conditions, noting that feudal government and society appear uniformly to rest upon a landed, or locally self-sufficient, economic base as distinguished from pastoral, commercial, or industrial. The merchant community, though it may play a significant role in the economy, is essentially outside the feudal nexus. It is readily observable that the appearance of certain technological features of government and economy, notably centralized communications and means of large-scale political organization, serve to make feudal government unnecessary and break down feudal social hierarchies. The condition of serfdom may not be specific to the feudal model since it calls for a particular form of attachment of a cultivator to land which is found in only certain parts of Europe. On the other hand we must postulate a long-term restriction on the mobility of the bulk of the population. The direct personal relationship of the land manager over the cultivators is also an essential feature which places the cultivator under feudalism somewhere between slavery on one side and free tenancy on the other.

Such a set of propositions cannot presume to constitute a final and sufficient definition of feudalism. But a definition of this type can be seen to consist of two parts. Of these, one (the theoretical or structural) can be left open. In other words, we can agree from a structural point of view that there are only a limited number of variables which require inclusion in the feudal syndrome and that the locus of these variables is by now well established. Further clarification of the feudal model requires no further debate over its major parts but rather a continuing effort at precise definition of the *essential features* of the agreed upon variables and beyond that a clarification of the limits of acceptable behavior within each of the sets of relationships of which the variable consists. Ideally, of course, a feudal society would be conceived of as comprising the essential elements stated above in their purest form. But no society has ever possessed a government in which authority in every instance was based upon a lord-vassal relationship, in which the hierarchy of social statuses coincided perfectly with the military and political hierarchy of ranks and with possession of land, and in which the economy was totally agrarian and all cultivators were serfs. Each of the elements of the feudal syndrome must be studied and compared with similar elements of other social conditions so as to determine the limits of permissible variability within which the feudal essential resides. That at this point in our historical study no such systematic effort has been made is in large part the reason behind the continued failure of historians to agree on a definition of feudalism. For in the absence of precise criteria of this kind, historians are prone to leave the boundaries of what they consider "feudal behavior" quite diffuse or are apt to insist on extremely particularistic conditions. The work of Max Weber in which he tries to differentiate feudal, bureaucratic, and patrimonial systems of authority illustrates the kind of further study necessary if we are to achieve,

with any degree of refinement, an agreement on the boundaries of the several elements of the feudal syndrome. So long as such studies are lacking, the effort to "prove or disprove" the existence of feudalism in any society on the basis of highly specific criteria will be open in some degree to individual judgment.

But let us proceed with the definition at hand as a tool of inquiry into Japanese history. Did Japan at any given time sufficiently exemplify the feudal model, as defined by us, to be classed as feudal? If we stay within the limits of generality of our model, the fit would seem acceptably close. It is possible to identify in the fabric of Japanese society as early as the eleventh century elements of feudal authority relationships, although not linked with other social and economic concomitants contained in the model. It is also possible to trace as late as the nineteenth century certain survivals of feudal governmental practice as well as survivals of feudal social organization and ideology. During the early sixteenth century Japanese society gave every indication of conforming in general outline to the ideal type itself. It is this moment in Japanese history, from roughly 1500 to 1550, that requires the most careful comparative analysis.

In order to confirm this observation we must compare Japanese practices with those ideal practices which we have adopted as the basic variables of the feudal syndrome. We can begin with the *tono* and *gokenin* relationship which in Japan coincided functionally with the lord-vassal relationship of our model. Described in general terms there is little question that the *gokenin* assumed towards his *tono* a posture of subordination to authority deriving from agreement in arms. On the basis of our theoretical model, however, we shall wish to apply further tests of equivalence. In particular we must know whether the *tono-gokenin* relationship was voluntary and honorable, and whether it was combined with the granting of land (conditions which are referred to in our model as homage and the fief). Both Asakawa and des Longrais have noted remarkable similarities between the practice of homage and the Japanese custom of *genzan,* between the swearing of the oath of allegiance and the signing of the *seishi,* between the fief and the *chigyōchi.* These practices appear to be sufficiently similar both in their individual parts and in their relationships to satisfy our test for equivalence. Yet, there are a number of specific differences between Japanese and European practices which must be taken into consideration before a final answer may be given. The most crucial difference appears as part of the specific bond which united superior and inferior in these different cultures. In Japan the relationship rested strongly on unwritten custom publicized by ceremonial observance; it relied less on written or oral contract which specified individual duties or privileges. The obligations of the Japanese *gokenin* were fully understood as part of a concensus of common behavior, and were set down in the lord's house regulations. The duties of the *tono* were left vague, although the responsibility of protection was commonly

assumed. The lord in Japan tended to exert greater paternalistic powers over the vassal, who had no recourse to an extra-feudal source of legal protection. The question of whether these differences contradict the existence of the essential political features of feudalism in Japan refers us back to the problem of definition itself and to the limits of specificity which have been set by the model. If homage is not homage unless it is accompanied by certain practices found mainly in France or England, if allegiance is not allegiance unless sealed by a contract of a certain type, then these elements must be added to the model and Japanese practices may then be judged too divergent to be considered feudal. But unless we choose to redefine the model itself, these specific differences fall into the level of traits which are not essential to feudalism but are specific to the different cultures of Europe and Japan.

Turning to the social sector, it is obvious that Japanese society, over a fairly lengthy period of history, coincided in general outline with the pattern of social structure defined in our model. The relative closure of classes was a common phenomenon during most of pre-modern Japan. The separation of an aristocratic class dedicated to the professional bearing of arms was also specific to the age of the military houses (*buke*). It is in Japan of the sixteenth century, particularly, that the condition in which a "hierarchy of social rank corresponding to the hierarchy of fiefs"[28] became prevalent.

Students of Japanese feudalism have been less critical in their citation of differences between Japanese and European social structure, yet this is not due to a lack of observable dissimilarities. No doubt it stems from the paucity of comparative studies in the social field. No adequate attention has been given, for instance, to the significance for comparative purposes of the perpetuation in Japan of an imperial court and a civil nobility into the world dominated by the military aristocracy. Certainly this tended to dilute the truly feudal aspects of Japanese society for several centuries. What is the significance of the particular form of Japanese family organization characterized by the strong concept of "house" (*ie*) in which a main family (*honke*) exerts primacy over its branch families (*bunke*)? This social pattern was especially widespread among *buke* houses and was extended, through fictive or ritual kinship practices, so as to form an underlying principle in the lord-vassal nexus. Thus vassalage in Japan was more apt to be symbolized in ritual kinship terms; the vassal might call himself a child (*ie-no-ko*) or adopt the lord's surname. These points of peculiarity, though they have excited relatively little attention in the West, reveal a number of divergences in the substance of social organization in Japan and Europe. Yet, at our present state of understanding, these differences would appear to fall below the level of generality at which we have described our feudal model. They reveal only that feudal relationships may be colored by a variety of cultural traits.

[28] K. Asakawa, *The Documents of Iriki* (Tokyo, 1955), 29.

Within the economic sphere there also is little doubt about the basic similarity of the Japanese economy and that of our feudal model. Land economy with a minimum of commercial activity characterized Japan until the seventeenth century. Thus land became the chief basis for distinguishing differences in social and political status. By the fifteenth century, public rights and duties met Maitland's dictum that they be "inextricably interwoven with the tenure of land". The worker of the land and the holder of the fief were (at least during the sixteenth century) closely interdependent. By this time fief rights (*chigyōken*) carried the privileges of free extraction (within customary limits) of land rent, corvée labor, and military service from the workers of the land, but they also carried the reciprocal responsibility of sound administration and protection of the fief.

Admittedly many of the precise forms of serfdom and manorialism typical of Europe did not appear in Japan. Both Asakawa and des Longrais have been careful to point out the difference in the nature of peasant dues. In Japan such dues were apt to be paid as portions of the produce of a land holding or in terms of an assessment figure abstracted from the cultivator's holdings. There was some, but less, provision for specific service dues such as work on the lord's demesne or corvée service. Asakawa explains this in terms of the difference between the intensive form of rice agriculture in Japan and the more extensive dry cultivation in the West. The differences between the Japanese *shō* and the European manor have been described by Asakawa in some detail.[29] But unless we are prepared to revise our definition of feudalism to include the particular details of manorial organization, the above variations do not affect the relevance of the feudal model to Japan.

The foregoing argument has affirmed the possibility of applying the concept of feudalism to Japan under certain specific definitional controls. What precisely does this signify? In actuality we have said nothing more than that certain Japanese institutions, notably during the sixteenth century, bore a generic resemblance to a set of theoretically defined institutional relationships which we have seen fit to call feudal. We have not "proved that Japan had feudalism" in its particular European guise, but rather that Japan during a certain period of its history developed a pattern of society which bore a specific resemblance to the essential features of an admittedly theoretical social model. But where do we proceed from here? What are the legitimate lines of inquiry which are opened up as a result of our argument so far?

Perhaps we should return again to a basic premise of this inquiry, namely that the use of the kind of general concept represented by the term feudalism takes the historian into a special realm of historical inquiry. We have shown that the historian must choose between a concept of feudalism defined in such limited terms that it is applicable only to certain areas of Western Europe or

[29] K. Asakawa, "The Early Shō and the Early Manor", *Journal of Economic and Business History*, 1.2 (Feb., 1929). Also des Longrais, *L'Est et L'Ouest*, 7-103.

that he must define his term so that it stands for a generalized, ideal type of society. These two methods are fundamentally distinct, since they involve two radically different aspects of the historian's methodology. Feudalism probably suffers more than other general concepts because from the start the term was so rooted in a particular European context. The term itself does not provide a means of differentiating the various levels of generality to which it may be applied. As a general concept, FEUDALISM (should we capitalize it in order to distinguish its specific nature?) must be recognized as a tool of historical inquiry with certain prescribed areas of application. It helps in the investigation of certain types of problems and can yield certain varieties of findings, but its proper sphere is limited. Certainly there is no special magic which can result from conceiving of Japan as feudal. The concept will not by any means unlock all the mysteries of Japanese history nor provide an explanation for specific events. In particular we are not justified in borrowing directly the explanations of European history into Japanese history. There should be no expectation on the part of historians "that having mastered western feudalism they can understand all feudal systems," including Japan's.[30]

Much of the objection we must raise against the voluminous literature on "feudal Japan" is that it contains too many assumptions that once feudalism is identified in Japan its very existence carries with it certain causal and explanatory necessities. The common literature on Japanese feudalism too frequently loses sight of the abstract nature of the concept and begins to use it with its full load of European connotations. The Marxists are not alone in conceiving of feudalism in almost anthropomorphic fashion as a living social organism which can be described as "taking over" a society, as "bringing" certain institutions into being, as "resisting" change or "leading" to other stages of society. This unfortunate practice of viewing feudalism almost as a foreign body which a society can "have" or "not have", a substance which once "had" inevitably leads to certain consequences, is at the core of a large number of the misuses of the feudal concept with respect to Japan.

In its strictest sense, the value of setting up a general model of feudalism (as with any other general concept) is that it can serve to focus attention upon a certain nexus of relationships within a given culture and, beyond this, to point up the essential ways in which these relationships "belong together." By studying a particular set of related traits in Japan, and by reference to a general model which embraces them, it is possible to place Japanese history (or at least a portion of it) into a genre of ideas of broad scope which have been generated out of the study of the model itself or from related studies. Such ideas, or hypotheses, may derive both from the analysis of the structural relationships within the model or from empirical studies of historical societies in actual fact. In either case they help to pose questions or frame hypotheses

[30] Bryce Lyon, *Middle Ages*, 13.

about institutional relationships and changes which can lead to more penetrating explanations of historical change in Japan. But it must be remembered that the juxtaposition of the model against Japanese historical data can only lead to points of hypothetical insight. The historian is not thereby provided with laws or necessities but rather with probabilities that a pattern of organization in one society or a process of change in another can help to identify pattern or process in Japanese history. Moreover the level of generality at which the model is defined sets the limits of types of hypothetical insight which can result from the comparative technique.

If this is the limit of the legitimate usage for a general model of feudalism, the question may well be asked: why attempt to define a model at all? For if comparisons leading to probabilities and hunches are the only result of the pains required in setting up an abstract model, cannot hypothetical comparisons be made at any point in history on an *ad hoc* basis between Europe and Japan? What is the point of "going through" an abstract model rather than applying comparative European data directly to that of Japan? The answer is, of course, that the use of the model helps to systematize comparative judgments. The model stands, as it were, in the midst of a set of observations of a generalized nature derived from the study of many societies and (hopefully to be sure) of a more general relevance than the casual observation which might result from comparisons intuitively picked out of the historian's experience.

At this point it becomes obvious that the kind of rigorously controlled comparison or hypothetical analysis which we have advocated has seldom been put to practice. Historians dealing with what they have termed Japanese feudalism continue to accept loose or ambigious definitions, borrow value judgments from European data, or assume that patterns of European historical development should provide norms for Japanese history. The difficulties inherent in the methodology of comparative history are indeed enormous. Few historians have acquired the necessary depth of experience in more than one society which will permit them to engage in systematic comparative procedures. Within the historical profession at large the inability of groups of historians, Western and Japanese, to communicate with each other on comparative lines has frustrated the possibility of combined attack upon problems of general conceptualization. This is borne out by the fact that the historical literature on feudalism in English and in Japanese today contains few points of useful coincidence.

Such is the rather unhappy situation which confronts the historian who would seek some solution to the problem of feudalism in Japan. Such in fact is the situation which has induced many a serious scholar to ask whether it would not be best to abandon the use of the term in writing about Japanese history. Clumsily or improperly used, the concept of feudalism unquestionably obstructs rather than aids the historian in his attempt to understand Japanese

history. Used within its proper limits, on the other hand, the term is far from providing a universal explanation. Should we not avoid the large errors and misunderstandings by foregoing the seemingly small advantages of using the term in a comparative sense? The answer to this query is probably dependent as much upon the temperament and basic conviction of the individual historian as upon any rational argument. The historian who holds that his work deals fundamentally with the unique and the non-quantifiable will instinctively shun the broader comparative problems inherent in the feudalism controversy. Those who incline towards the general, or are obliged to generalize in the course of their writing, will seek to gain cumulative knowledge about general processes of social change or patterns of institutional behavior. Few historians have managed both tasks equally well, and few, it would seem, who are of one sort have tolerance for the other. Ironically it would seem that the most significant contributions to our understanding of Japanese history appear to have come from a dialectic process operating between these two extremes. On the one hand, the exaggerated over-generalizations of comparative historians while rejected by more cautious scholars have nonetheless obliged historians to look afresh at their materials and frequently to acknowledge the modicum of truth contained in the over-generalization. On the other hand the work of constant and meticulous digging into the data of Japanese and European history has provided the basis for new levels of hypothetical inquiry. The problem of what to do with the concept of feudalism falls therefore between the historian's innate skepticism toward "general systems" and his need to have categories for the organization of his observations with respect to human behavior.

Let us agree then that there are legitimate areas within which a general concept of feudalism may be applied to Japan, but that this must be done with full recognition of a number of qualifying propositions. First, it is obvious that an analysis of feudalism *in* Japan is an operation which must yield results of a quite different sort from the usual narrative history of "feudal Japan". The former is a technical undertaking, the latter is a conventional form of historical exposition in which the use of the term feudalism often obscures more than it clarifies. Secondly we should expect that in contrast to Europe, feudal practices in Japan would differ considerably in origin, pattern of development, and manner of disappearance. Thirdly that these very differences are important in pointing up basic cultural contrasts between Japan and Europe.

In reassessing the subject of feudalism *in* Japan our first task must be to retrace the origins and developments of feudal institutions in Japanese society and to assess the area of Japanese history which can be "explained" by reference to the feudal concept. Here the early and late phases of the process require our special attention, for it is at the ends of the process that the greatest discrepancies between concept and data seem to appear.

The "origin of feudalism" in Japan is most often identified with the establishment of the Kamakura shogunate by Minamoto-no-Yoritomo in 1192. But in the strict sense of our definition this date marks neither the origin of feudal practices nor of feudal society in Japan. For while vassalage and enfeoffment may have originated considerably before the twelfth century, it is also clear that only a small portion of Japanese society was organized around these practices by 1192.[31] To try to explain Kamakura Japan as a "feudal society" exaggerates beyond acceptability the prevalence of the feudal nexus. In Kamakura Japan the legal government was still centered upon the emperor. It operated through the traditional civil administration (greatly weakened to be sure) and an expanding system of semi-public domains (*shōen*). In terms of volume, while the bulk of the personnel of the lower administrative and managerial apparatus had taken up the military profession, the greater portion of this personnel served as hereditary agents within the civil domains. Their relationships to their superiors could not be described as that of vassal to lord but rested upon the customary administrative practices left behind as the centralized imperial system of government gradually declined. On the other hand, independent of these administrative and fiscal relationships based upon the *shōen,* there were numerous informal hierarchies built upon clan ties and military allegiances. Military hierarchies tended to form around the leadership of local magnates. They were most often not based upon the reciprocal grant of land rights or official title. It was primarily within the hierarchy of such allegiances as they came to center upon the office of shogun (or certain other high military posts) that the essential feudal element was added to the military clique.

The power structure created by Yoritomo and assembled at Kamakura was first of all based on the military band of which he was chief. The band was eventually extended to include the majority of military (*bushi*) families in eastern Japan (the *Kantō*) and then spread out more thinly to the rest of the provinces. While we have no exact count of the numbers of Yoritomo's vassals (*gokenin*), the most common estimate is that he started with approximately 2,000, a rather small number when one considers the entire size of the managerial class of the provinces.[32] The members of Yoritomo's band were naturally of various capacities. Some were proprietors of considerable proportions with authority over lands which embraced entire counties. Such great provincial families had typically held regional offices of importance in the imperial system. They were located mostly in the eastern provinces, which formed the geographic base of the Kamakura hegemony. In the main,

[31] An excellent survey of the problem of Yoritomo's rise to power is found in Minoru Shinoda, *The Founding of the Kamakura Shogunate 1180-1185* (New York, 1960), especially 114-144.

[32] Senō Seiichirō, "Hizen-no-kuni ni okeru Kamakura gokenin", *Nihon rekishi,* 117 (March, 1958), 35.

however, the rank and file of Yoritomo's housemen (*gokenin*) were *bushi* of the petty land managing variety. The tie between Yoritomo and these housemen became technically feudal as Yoritomo gained in authority and was able to grant confirmation or protection of land holdings in return for pledges of loyalty.

Yoritomo's importance to the development of feudalism in Japan is that he regularized and extended the practice of combining pledges of military allegiance with protection over land holdings. At first this action was at best extra-legal. Yoritomo's public authority to make appointments and to interfere in the *shōen* system was based on his emergency assertion of supreme military command in a time of national crisis. But by the time he became shogun, his legal powers had vastly increased.[33] He himself held directly a large agglomeration of *shōen* granted to him by the emperor. This made him a power within the imperial system comparable to the court aristocracy and the great temples. In these *shōen* he held rights of appointment over subordinate officials. In addition, the shogun was made "proprietor" (*kokushu*) of the nine provinces of eastern Japan. In these areas he was empowered to make his own appointments of administrative officials. Throughout vast regions of Japan, then, he had the authority to appoint governors, civil officials, *shōen* officials, and stewards (*jitō*). All such appointments carried with them both title and income in the form of land tenures (*shiki*).

While the legal rights to make appointments and confirm *shiki* came to the shogun from the central civil government, Yoritomo's use of these rights was in the main personal and military. Appointments were made to his followers who had pledged service as housemen. It is in this respect that the power to appoint *shugo* and *jitō* was so important to Yoritomo's system. Justified originally in 1186 over the need to clean up remnants of military resistance, Yoritomo secured the right to set *shugo* (or military governors) over all provinces, where they would exercise control over provincial military and police affairs, and *jitō* (or stewards) over the land system in order to assure regular tax collection and to collect an emergency military tax for the prosecution of the war. The *shugo-jitō* system was not conceived of as replacing imperial local administration but rather as supplementary to it. Its importance to Yoritomo was that it provided the shogun a network of provincial connections which extended over the country. It was this network which gave Yoritomo's Kamakura headquarters its national character. For as Yoritomo appointed his housemen to posts of *shugo* and *jitō* in distant provinces, he built his band of followers into a national organization.

The degree to which Japan has been considered "feudal" during the Kamakura depends in large measure upon the extent to which the authority

[33] Satō Shin'ichi, "Bakufu ron", *Shin Nihonshi kōza* (Tokyo, 1951), 14-17; Ishimoda Tadashi, "Kamakura seiken no seiritsu katei ni tsuite", *Rekishigaku kenkyū*, 200 (Oct., 1956), 15.

of the *shugo-jitō* system is believed to have taken over in Japan. Until recently, scholars (such as Asakawa and Japanese legal historians) tended to exaggerate the power exercised by the shogun. This is perhaps a natural outcome of the studies of Kamakura institutions which took their material largely from shogunal records. More recent studies have put the shogunate in better perspective.[34] Unquestionably the establishment of the shogunate was a major turning point in Japan's political history. Yet since the country shifted only slowly from its customary administrative and legal practices, the bulk of the people continued to be governed through a non-feudal apparatus; the bulk of the land was controlled under the *shōen* system centering on Kyoto. The same may be said about the social and economic sectors of Japanese society. Socially, the military aristocracy was only beginning to differentiate itself from the general mass of upper and lower aristocracy which still adhered to the court system of ranks and official titles. What in later centuries became merely a convenient system of titles and rank designations to demarcate statuses in the military hierarchy was in these days still a meaningful apparatus for the exercise of authority. Thus the Kamakura *bushi,* though basing much of their actual power upon the force of arms, nonetheless depended for legitimacy upon the possession of posts and ranks within the imperial system. Their functions were as yet limited chiefly (except in the Kantō area) to the police and military sectors of Japanese society. The fief as an economic concomitant of political organization was still not fully developed. The benefice (*onkyū)* was granted in terms of rights (*shiki*) to income from *shōen.* They were held under conditions set by *shōen* law which derived in turn from the imperial system. Public and private law had not by any means coalesced.

While we must be careful not to see feudal practices where they did not exist during the Kamakura period, it is also clear that as the period progressed the feudal nexus in government and society steadily encroached upon the imperial-*shōen* complex. It is this process of encroachment which Asakawa has explained chiefly in terms of the shift from *shōen* to *chigyō* (fief) within the land tenure system.[35] But the process was both more complex and more gradual than revealed in Asakawa's studies, and must be traced at several levels within both the political and social sectors.

To begin with, at the apex of the state structure, military authority gradually overreached civil authority. During the thirteenth century the balance between civil and military power shifted steadily in the direction of Kamakura. A turning point in this shift took place in 1221 when the Kamakura forces

[34] This perspective has been gained chiefly through local studies in regions other than the Kantō and southern Kyushu. A notable study of the balance between civil and military authority in the province of Bizen is contained in Kanai Madoka, "Kamakura jidai Bizen kokugaryō ni tsuite", *Nihon rekishi,* 150 (Dec., 1960), 36-54.

[35] K. Asakawa, "The Life of a Monastic Sho in Medieval Japan", *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1916,* I (1919), 311-346.

quickly routed an army mustered against them by the emperor Go-Toba. With this victory the Kamakura shogunate completed its extension of the *jitō* system into all territory and acquired the power of direct interference in court and imperial household affairs.

At the provincial level of government, military interests gained over civilian as the *shugo* increasingly took on the stature of military governors.[36] Locally the *shugo* were able to build up their economic support largely through the plural holding of *jitō* rights to numerous *shōen.* They used their superior status in the shogunal hierarchy to assert their influence among local *bushi.* Before long the *shugo* had absorbed many civil administrative powers at the same time that they achieved personal leadership of province-wide military bands which they organized increasingly on a lord-vassal basis.

Below the *shugo,* the step by step expansion of the *jitō*'s land rights also served to extend the feudal element in Japanese society.[37] At the outset, *jitō* had been given limited police and fiscal powers within the *shōen,* for which they received the rights to specified incomes or units of salary land (*kyūden*). Soon, however, they began to take over tax collection rights for entire *shōen* on a contract basis, though without securing additional proprietory rights. A further encroachment occurred during the mid-Kamakura period when the *jitō* obliged the civil proprietors to acquiesce to a division of the *shōen,* generally on a half-and-half basis. This procedure, known as *shitaji-chūbun* had been carried out in a large percentage of the *shōen* by the middle of the fourteenth century. It gave to the *jitō* proprietory rights (*chigyōken*) over the newly acquired portion of the *shōen.* Thus by the end of the Kamakura period many of the *jitō* had become true proprietors with the right to subdivide or to grant to their followers the lands they held.

The implications of this last development were most profound. For as local *bushi* became proprietors (*ryōshu*) endowed with lands at their disposal, they began to divide these lands among family members or retainers, extending the practice of linking grants of land to bonds of military loyalty. The new military bonds forged between *shugo* and proprietory *jitō* or between *jitō* and vassal families became the basis of an ever widening system of social and political organization which was essentially feudal and which continually encroached upon civil authority in the provincial areas.

A comparison of Japanese society of the fourteenth century with that of the twelfth in terms of composition and stratification shows numerous contrasts. The *bushi* as a class had increased in self-consciousness and in numbers. The first attempts at the formulation of a legal code for military

[36] For an example of the rise of a powerful *shugo* house see Matsuoka Hisato, "Ōuchi-shi no hatten to sono ryōkoku shihai", in Uozumi Sōgorō, ed., *Daimyō ryōkoku to jōkamachi* (Tokyo, 1957), 24-98.

[37] Nishioka Toranosuke, "Chūsei shōen ni okeru jitō", in *Shōenshi no kenkyū* (30, Tokyo, 1956-1957), 3. 783-857.

houses (1223) was followed by a growing awareness of the social and political importance of the military man in Japanese society as revealed in the later writings of the Ashikaga period. The shift toward primogeniture, though only incidental to the feudal condition, was clearly visible by this time.

For the common cultivator, the major change affecting his life during these years was the final disappearance of territory administered as "public domain" (*kōryō*). Throughout Japan land management, whether of civil or military proprietors, had been reduced to private customary arrangements between the proprietor (*ryōshu*), his agents, and the rent producing cultivator (now designated as *myōshu*). Ties of personal bondage were becoming more common.

The warfare which embroiled most of Japan during the middle of the fourteenth century hastened the above trends in all parts of the country. The establishment of the Ashikaga shogunate radically altered the former balance between civil and military authority in favor of the military-feudal complex. Under the Ashikaga shogunate in effect there ceased to be two governments in Japan. The shogunate, now located in the very seat of the imperial court in Kyoto, absorbed most of the powers and functions of the civil government, though even now the emperor continued to play a crucial role as the ritual symbol of sovereignty and the source of the shogun's delegated authority. The tenacity of civil fiscal practices is evident as well, for it was not until the end of the fifteenth century that the *shōen* completely disappeared in central Japan.

In the provinces the key figures were the *shugo,* now vastly more powerful than their Kamakura predecessors. By the end of the fourteenth century the *shugo* had developed into true regional overlords, having acquired the combined powers of the former civil and military governors.[38] In other words they held title, under the shogun, to territories the size of entire provinces, serving as the ultimate authority in both civil and military affairs. But it must be pointed out that they did not hold these provinces as unitary fiefs. Although within a province the *shugo* family was the most powerful, this was only relative to a number of other powerful families. In no province did the *shugo* count all military men his vassals, and within the province he held but a fraction (perhaps a tenth) of the land in fief. Thus, in asserting authority over the province, the *shugo* was still obliged to rely upon remnants of imperial authority. This is the prime reason that the *shugo* protected, to a point at least, the *shōen* interests of court or religious establishments within their provinces.

The government of the early Ashikaga period was to this degree a hybrid organism in which military government still depended upon remnants of the imperial administrative system. Under the Ashikaga shoguns the feudal

[38] Sugiyama Hiroshi, "Muromachi bakufu", in *Nihon rekishi kōza* (Tokyo, 1956), 3. 49.

authority structure was still to some extent obliged to function through the machinery of the imperial system. In fact the discrepancy between the coercive power of the *shugo* and the administratively specified areas of local jurisdiction over which they were placed, was in essence a measure of the discrepancy between the effectiveness of the feudal system and the national hegemony it claimed for itself. During the fifteenth century, as the *shugo* extended their claims over more and more territory, they found the task of organizing and holding their territories increasingly difficult.

By 1500 most of the jurisdictional territories of the *shugo* had been broken into fragments and a wave of new magnates of local origin had inherited the pieces. The *shugo* had disappeared and with them not only a generation of *bushi* leaders but also the last remnants of imperial law and civil land management based on the *shōen*. The new group of local magnates owed nothing to external sources of power. Their domains had been built from the bottom up on strictly military principles.[39]

The local magnates of the sixteenth century, the largest of whom were called daimyo, represented new conditions of local government and social configuration. Their territories were no longer scattered but were concentrated in single contiguous domains, which in most instances they had won through conquest. Their followers were closely clustered around them in compact territorial units. By now the distinction between the boundaries of legal jurisdiction and outright mastery had been largely obliterated. The complex division of *shiki* rights among several layers of *shōen* proprietorships had given way to the consolidated fief. A daimyo held his land through his own capacity to fight for it and could dispose of it as he pleased. He wielded absolute power over his vassals as the lord who granted and guaranteed them their fiefs. Within his domain all "warriors were vassals and rear-vassals".[40]

A description of the unitary domain of the sixteenth century reveals how close to the feudal model Japanese society had developed by this time. As an example let us take the territory of the house of Urakami in the province of Bizen. During the 1550's this unit, covering a geographical area of roughly six hundred square miles, consisted of 172 separate fiefs held directly by lord Urakami or by his 59 major vassals. Each of these vassals maintained a castle which dominated his major holding and subinfeudated his land to his own followers. Between lord Urakami and his vassals there passed oaths of loyalty sworn in the names of Shinto and Buddhist deities, and grants of fief defined in terms of villages or parts of villages. Within the domain, administration and enforcement of justice was undifferentiated from the lord-vassal system of authority relationships. At the village level, individual cultivators

[39] J. W. Hall, "Foundations of the Modern Japanese Daimyo", *JAS*, XX.3 (May, 1961), 322-323.

[40] Asakawa, *Iriki*, 29.

owed rent, corvée duty, and loyal service to lord Urakami, his vassals or rear-vassals. Although villages were organized into semi-selfgoverning communities, *bushi* retainers of the Urakami lived close enough to the villages to maintain direct ties of supervision over individual peasant families, thus making for a peasant status approximately like that of serfdom.[41]

The condition of extreme political decentralization resulting from the appearance of the elemental fief lasted for a comparatively short time in Japan. In quick succession Japan came under the dominance of a few powerful overlords who grasped control of large regional coalitions of daimyo, and then between 1582 and 1590 under a national hegemony of daimyo led by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. The movement towards centralization on the national level was matched by a similar integration process within the daimyo domains. In particular, the daimyo in order to achieve more effective adminstration of their territories, began to eliminate the small fiefs into which their domains had been subdivided. The great civil wars which engulfed Japan from the 1530's through 1590 and which culminated in the formation of a new national hegemony gave rise to conditions which served to eliminate the most typical feudal practices from many sectors of Japanese society. Ironically, when Japan was for the first time brought completely under the rule of "feudal lords", those very lords had begun to divest themselves of the most fundamentally feudal aspects of their means of governance.[42]

The Tokugawa regime, established in 1603 with its headquarters at Edo, rested at least superficially upon a fulfillment of some of the trends which we have traced up to now as indices of the growth of feudal practices in Japan. The entire country was now governed by daimyo who in turn were the shogun's vassals. The "military band" had by now apparently taken over the entire operation of government. Furthermore, the seemingly artificial efforts of the Tokugawa regime to create a closed caste out of the samurai and to tie the peasantry to the land, support the view that Japan was at long last feudal through and through.[43]

Historians have recognized, however, the danger of too sweeping a characterization of Tokugawa Japan as feudal. Most writers have tended to soften their judgment by referring to the Tokugawa age as a period of "late feudalism", "centralized feudalism", or "national feudalism". Asakawa was also careful to point out that the Tokugawa system was "no longer purely feudal, either on the whole or in its parts, either in its warrior class or in its peasantry".[44] Unfortunately Asakawa never fully amplified these views except

[41] Shimizu Mitsuo, *Nihon chūsei no sonraku* (Tokyo, 1942), 121-166.

[42] Asakawa, *Iriki*, 44.

[43] The recent trend among Japanese historians to view the seventeenth century as the culmination of feudalism in Japan rests largely on economic grounds. The foremost advocate of this view is Araki Moriaki (see his "Taikō kenchi no rekishiteki igi", *Rekishigaka kenkyū* 167 (Jan., 1954), 12-23).

[44] Asakawa, "Some Aspects", 101.

in his study of the peasantry under Tokugawa rule, a task for which he was not the best suited. Since Asakawa's time it has been more common for Western writers to subscribe to the "re-feudalization" theory, in other words that the Tokugawa rulers took over a Japan that was rapidly moving away from feudalism and returned it to a more strictly feudal condition.[45]

The most obvious reason why Tokugawa society has been looked upon as a feudal throwback stems from a misreading of the evidence of what was happening in Japan during the sixteenth century. The assumption that Japan was about to "throw off" feudalism before 1600 and was "re-feudalized" thereafter results from the exaggerated significance assigned to certain purportedly "anti-feudal" trends such as increased social mobility, growing foreign trade, the use of firearms, and the like. There is no denying that many of these accepted symbols of the "decline of feudalism" in Europe did appear in sixteenth century Japan. But both their appearance and later disappearance were incidental to the main stream of institutional development in Japan at that time. The truly significant developments of these centuries were of another order and were closely tied to the growth of daimyo authority.[46] The feudal element in Japanese government, social structure, economy, and climate of thought did indeed begin to shrink in importance after the mid-sixteenth century, but this tendency was both slow and continuous, extending well beyond the beginning of the Tokugawa regime. The trend was not noticeably arrested by the cessation of foreign trade or the proliferation of social class legislation.

Tokugawa government is best described by the term coined by Japanese historians for the purpose, the *baku-han* system. This view of the machinery of Tokugawa government as a balance between shogunate and daimyo domains (*han*) should be thought of neither as a frustrated national unity nor as an agency of re-feudalization. Nor should it be assumed that the system was somehow given its perfect and final form by Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first shogun, in the early 1600's to be perpetuated unchanged thereafter. The beginnings of the *baku-han* system go back to the middle of the sixteenth century; its full maturity did not come until at least the beginning of the eighteenth.

How feudal was the *baku-han* system? Admittedly the bond between the shogun and daimyo took the form of that between lord and vassal. Up to the very end of the Tokugawa period the larger daimyo retained an independence in policy and military affairs unthinkable in a fully centralized state. On the other hand the actual means of communication between daimyo and shogun had become highly impersonal, and shogunal authority had increased markedly in its control over the daimyo and their domestic policies. This was

[45] E. O. Reischauer, "Japan", in Coulborn, *Feudalism in History*, 36-37.

[46] J. W. Hall, "The Castle Town and Japan's Modern Urbanization", *FEQ*, XV.1 (Nov., 1955), 41-45.

especially true of the *fudai* daimyo who never really gained sufficient independenc to function as more than local administration agents for the shogun.

If the relationship of shogun to daimyo exhibited a balance between feudal and bureaucratic techniques, the trend toward centralized bureaucratic procedures was conspicuous within the *han*. The key institution in this regard was the *kashindan,* or the assemblage of retainers, which comprised the staff of the shogun and the daimyo. In the early years of the Tokugawa period, the relationship of housemen to daimyo was still in the main personal and voluntary. Though many of the retainers were stipended, the upper strata were individually enfeoffed. But later, with the nearly complete withdrawal of the samurai from the land to live in the castle headquarters towns of the daimyo, the members of the *kashindan* lost their individual identity. Grouped by rank into an army-type organization they were placed under appointed leaders and assigned freely to civil and military duties. Throughout the Tokugawa period the tendency within the shogunal and daimyo administration was for the central authority to gain at the expense of the independent vassal. Within the *kashindan* the number of landed and high salaried officers was constantly reduced while the number of dependent and stipended men increased. Eventually even the remaining land allotments were fictionalized. In certain instances daimyo without territory received rice incomes from the shogun's granary.[47] In the han, supposedly enfeoffed retainers actually received only stipends, losing all powers of interference in the affairs of the villages which once comprised their fiefs. By the beginning of the eighteenth century nearly ninety per cent of the daimyo had forced their entire retinues to draw their subsistence from the domain granaries.[48]

These changes were accompanied by important changes in the nature of the bond which tied samurai to daimyo. The pledge of loyalty, once so sacred as to be sealed in blood, became increasingly formalized and perfunctory. In many instances the personally sworn oath was dispensed with and required only when a retainer took an important post in the daimyo's service. Thus, in most areas of Japan "personal vassalage privately rewarded by enfeoffment was giving way to a system of military statuses which fed into a civil and military bureaucracy. Loyalty was becoming a principle rather than a private commitment."[49] The daimyo became more a legal symbol than a personal despot.

In other sectors of Tokugawa society also authority was being exerted less as a personal right than through institutional or legal channels. The authority of the samurai class, asserted under the feudal system as a privately exercised prerogative over fiefs and cultivators, gave way to a more impersonal

[47] The Hitotsubashi branch of the Tokugawa house received 100,000 *hyō* (bales) of rice.
[48] See Kanai Madoka, "Dokai kōshūki ni okeru bakuhan taisei no ichi hyōgen", *Shinano*, 3.6 (June, 1951), 37-47.
[49] J. W. Hall, "The Modern Japanese Daimyo", 327-328.

and public administrative system. For the farming class the condition of personal bondage gave way to the status of taxpaying tenant of the daimyo. Local administration was absorbed into the daimyo's bureaucracy and no longer subdivided among the daimyo's retainers. Corvée labor and personal indenture was increasingly replaced by paid labor and paid domestic service.[50]

How useful is it to call Tokugawa Japan feudal? The historian meets in seventeenth and eighteenth century Japan many of the same conceptual problems that he did in the Kamakura age. Here was a time when only a dwindling portion of the structure and process of Japanese government and society conformed to the requirements of the feudal model. Yet the tendency has always been to stress the importance of this feudal remnant. And understandably so, for the period was obviously dominated by the *bushi* class, the prime agents of feudal practices in Japan from the twelfth century on. In fact, Japan of Tokugawa times was probably more thoroughly dominated and saturated by the samurai than at any other time in its history. And yet the samurai class itself was becoming less characteristically feudal in its manner of exercising political authority and in the social and economic institutions which it nourished.

The task of identifying the essentially feudal from the non-essential remnants of traditional practices is made the more difficult for the historian of the Tokugawa period because the samurai themselves were so loath to part with their memories of the past. As in Europe, the "idea of feudalism" lingered much longer than the substance. The forms, rituals, and speech of feudalism continued in much the same way in Tokugawa Japan as did the fief in its fictionalized form. Certainly if Tokugawa institutions are to be called feudal, this must be done with a full realization of the declining feudal content of many political and social practices.

Feudalism as a concept of explanation for Tokugawa history thus has serious limitations. The tendency of the historian of post-Tokugawa Japan to explain Tokugawa institutions as feudal obscures too much. Such phrases as the "death agony of feudalism" or the "abolition of feudalism" are suggestive of much more change than actually took place. The common failing of historians to keep more of the old system around than the facts justify permits them in the end to kill off a healthier old regime that actually existed. The abolition of the *han* and of the samurai status after 1871 or the granting of land ownership certificates in 1873 symbolize the passing of institutions which had only a superficial resemblance to the criteria of a strictly defined feudal model.

In the foregoing paragraphs we have been able to narrate the story of feudalism *in* Japan without any necessary reference to European experience.

[50] See K. Asakawa, "Notes on Village Government in Japan after 1600", *JAOS*, XXX-XXXI (1910-1911), 259-300; 151-216. Also T. C. Smith, *The Agrarian Origins of Modern Japan* (Stanford, 1959), 24-25.

A study of feudalism *in* Japan can be carried through, then, completely within the confines of Japanese history itself. Since the Japanese data contain terms for each of the specified relationships which make up the feudal model, it would have been possible, in fact, to have written the whole story in Japanese. What, then, has been the value of setting up a model of feudalism as a backdrop to Japanese history? The answer must be found not in the story we have just narrated but elsewhere; it lies in the comparative and causal questions which can now be asked, and perhaps answered, about Japanese history.

The variety of questions which the comparative historian may ask of his data can only be suggested in the pages which follow. These questions may obviously take off from positive or negative premises, from observed similarities or differences, and they may have as their objective the further clarification of the *general concept* of feudalism or of a given historical situation in Japan, Europe, or elsewhere. Now is the proper time to inquire about the differences and similarities between the origin of feudal practices in Europe and Japan, or in the way feudalism declined. What about the "ghost empire" or the "barbarian frontier"; are these necessary ingredients of the pre-feudal environment? Should the emphasis be placed on *empire* of the variety of ancient Rome, or only on a pre-existent system of civil law and administration? Could a modern society adopt a feudal form of government?[51] Or again we may wish to ask about the role of religion in feudal society. How is it that in both Europe and Japan universal religions (Christianity and Buddhism) functioned so importantly as the intellectual guiding force in an otherwise decentralized society? How important to feudalism was the religious establishment? We may wish to ask about the significance of technology. Must the military aristocracy in a feudal system always wield a sword and clothe itself in armor, or is it a matter of the monopoly of superior arms (of any variety) that counts? Turning to the end of the feudal spectrum we may enquire into such matters as the effect of money economy upon feudal government, the relationship of "feudal patterns of loyalty" to national consciousness, and like problems of transition from feudalism to other forms of society. Such questions and many more have been asked by historians for many generations, but seldom with the necessary openness of approach. The pursuit of hypotheses which ramify from the feudal concept do not yield new criteria which then must be added to the feudal model itself. New observations about the relationship of religion or of money economy to feudalism are useful hypothetical statements to associate with the feudal concept, but they do not constitute part of the model itself.

Turning our comparative process in another direction, we can open up a range of possible insights into Japanese history by inquiring into the reasons

[51] For an attempt to apply the feudal concept to Nazi Germany see Robert Koehl, "Feudal Aspects of National Socialism", *The American Political Science Review*, LIV.4 (Dec., 1960).

for significant differences between European and Japanese institutions. The identification of such differences and studies of their causes help to point up many aspects of Japanese history which have given it its special quality. Asakawa was not the first but certainly one of the most incisive in posing questions regarding differences between Europe and Japan in such areas as international relations, social organization, law, and agriculture. One characteristic of Japan's international position, to take up one of these avenues of inquiry, was its isolation. Isolation protected the Japanese islands from foreign invasion and the easy interference of foreign powers. Does not this condition help account for the slow evolutionary nature of the process of the change in Japanese institutions and the simultaneous continuation of seemingly contradictory institutions (for instance, civil and military systems of government) over long periods of time? Isolation and the homogeneity of the Japanese populace also meant that warfare was always civil war, a condition which may account for the frequent lack of completeness in the outcome of great power struggles in Japan. Thus, Japanese military government seldom achieved a complete degree of centralization, but was generally based on a balance of forces resulting from military compromise. Does this factor also explain the unique relationship in Japan between feudal organization and the source of ultimate sovereignty, the Emperor? How do we account for the continued importance of the imperial institution despite its loss of political power? Why did not the feudal hierarchy ever seek to displace the emperor? Certainly answers to these questions will reveal a great deal about the manner in which power was held and legitimized in Japan.

In practices pertaining to the feudal syndrome itself numerous points of difference between Japan and Europe intrigue the historian into asking for underlying explanations. Is it not possible, for instance, that the Japanese have consistently maintained a more strongly clan-like social organization, especially within the families which comprised the political elite? And does this not account for the fact that the leader-follower relationship has so often been expressed in paternalistic, family-based forms? The historical vocabulary signifying lord and vassal in Japan is full of familial terms such as *yori-oya* (parent = lord), *yori-ko* (child = vassal), *kachū* (the household, meaning all vassals), *kenin* or *kashin* (housemen), *higo* (dependent child, meaning serf). Does this heavy emphasis on family concepts not help to account for the lack of clearly spelled out provisions of lordship and vassalage in Japan?

Numerous other questions come to mind, the answers to which are far from being certain. What has been the influence on Japanese government, especially at the local level, of an economy which places such heavy emphasis on rice as the staple crop and on intensive cultivation based on intensive labor and intricate irrigation techniques? How has Buddhism, so different in its social ethic from Christianity, affected the pattern of thought and behavior of the various Japanese classes, especially of the warrior elite? Is it possible to

identify the distinctive influence of Chinese legal systems and social philosophy upon the ideas of the governing class and in the development of judicial institutions in Japan? For each of these questions, comparison with relevant European experience helps to clarify the problem and point to possible areas of explanation.

Comparative interests have encouraged still a bolder line of inquiry regarding large scale processes of social change in Japan. Questions of this type have not always been posed on valid premises, but they have turned the attention of the historian nonetheless to new areas of investigation. Even those who have pursued the "re-feudalization" theory have asked significant questions which, when answered, will reveal a great deal that is yet unknown about Japan. Why did not Sakai develop as a free city? Why did not Hideyoshi, or at least Ieyasu, destroy the daimyo and establish a centralized national state? Why did the Tokugawa "reaffirm" the samurai class? These are questions the comparative historian asks, though perhaps with little hope of answer. And he asks them for the very reason that he is struck by contrasts or similarities with what he knows of other histories. It is from such a speculative frame of mind that one of the most intriguing of all comparative questions has been posed, first by Asakawa and most recently by Reischauer. In a discourse on "the feudal legacy" in Japan Reischauer suggests that the feudal experience in Japan "which so closely paralleled that of Europe, may have had something to do with the speed and ease with which the Japanese during the past century refashioned their society and government on European models."[52] Such factors in Japanese society as the aristocratic military tradition, the code of honor, national consciousness, concepts of law, styles of economic and social organization, all of which contrasted with parallel Chinese institutions, he suggests, may well account for Japan's early lead in modernization. Speculations of this last type do not necessarily depend for their existence on the perusal of a systematic comparative technique. But any attempted answer must rest upon the disciplined use of terms and procedures of comparison.

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[52] E. O. Reischauer, "Japan", in Coulborn, *Feudalism in History*, 46. See also E. O. Reischauer, "Our Asian Frontiers of Knowledge", *University of Arizona Bulletin, Riecker Memorial Lecture No. 4*, (Tucson, 1958) for a fuller treatment of this idea.